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# **Derrida and Political Resistance: The Radical Potential of Deconstruction**

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## **Abstract**

This paper begins from the claim that the currently dominant approaches to the study of political resistance in global politics, namely the (Neo-)Gramscian and Foucauldian traditions, suffer from a common problem in that the forms of resistance they conceptualise are highly susceptible to appropriation by, or reinscription within, prevailing forms of global ordering. In an attempt to respond to this shortcoming, or, more properly, to explore how this reinscription of resistance might itself be resisted, the paper offers an account of political resistance developed using the thought of Jacques Derrida. Having established the parallel between the way in which prevailing relations of sovereign power and governmental ordering all too quickly co-opt and engulf resistance, and the way in which metaphysics calls thought back to order and tends towards onto-political totalisation, it is argued that by means of a deconstructive approach, acts of resistance may be further radicalised by adding to them second- and third-order onto-political critiques—namely of the resistance-act itself and the agent or actor of resistance herself. The core claim made is that inasmuch as deconstruction attempts to interrupt forms of thinking and knowing right up to and including processes of conscious and unconscious subjectification, it can provide valuable means by which the micro-gestures of onto-politics can be resisted at the (fundamentally interrelated) levels of political thought and concrete praxis.

## **Introduction**

The study of political resistance in the field of global politics has expanded and diversified over the last decade; the escalation of global dissent and protest activities, from the Arab uprisings to the Occupy movements, to ongoing struggles against the neo-liberalisation of higher education and the privatisation of public sector institutions, has injected renewed energy into academic research on the topic. In the Anglophone literature, the emergent scholarship has fallen broadly into two main traditions, namely a (Neo-)Gramscian approach and a Foucault-inspired orientation. These divergent approaches suffer, however, from a common problem in that the forms of resistance they conceptualise are highly susceptible to appropriation by, or reinscription within, prevailing forms of global ordering. In particular, existing accounts of the subject or agent of resistance, whether framed in terms of Gramscian counter-hegemonic social movements or the Foucauldian practitioner of counter-conduct, frequently fall prey to enacting unwitting reproductions of precisely the forms of both macro and micro-disciplinary processes of ordering they seek to resist. As Lara Montesinos Coleman and Karen Tucker note, 'governmental power may be exercised and the status quo stabilised in and through even the most grassroots or subaltern practices of contestation' (2011, p. 401). More forcefully put, in Judith Butler's words, one may believe that one is resisting, for instance, Fascism, 'only to find that the identificatory source of one's own opposition is Fascism itself, and that Fascism depends essentially on the kind of resistance one offers' (2000, p. 173).<sup>1</sup>

In an attempt to respond to this problem of the reappropriation of resistance back into the folds of global ordering, or, more properly, how this reinscription might itself be resisted, this paper builds upon the existing critical literature by offering a conceptualisation of political resistance and its agents or subjects utilising the thought of Jacques Derrida. The argument made begins from Derrida's claim that politics and metaphysics are fundamentally interrelated; the paper shows that a parallel may be drawn between the way in which prevailing relations of sovereign power and governmental ordering all too quickly co-opt and engulf resistance, and the way in which metaphysics calls thought back to order and tends towards onto-political totalisation. Both political and metaphysical ordering, it is suggested, operate through a cumulative plethora of micro-disciplinary gestures, sometimes clearly, but often imperceptibly, closing down avenues of thought and steering potentially disruptive action back towards the status quo. Accordingly, resistance to such ordering processes must meet both these obvious and barely visible but endless series of cooptations as they occur, pulling, in a variety of different directions, away from the appropriation of thought and action back into the same. It is here that a deconstructive approach to resistance has purchase; insofar as the ceaseless movements of deconstruction seek to knock relentless processes of ontologisation off course, they endeavour to interrupt and thereby resist such intricate processes of conceptual consolidation.

Consequently, while not claiming that such a formulation can finally avoid or resolve this complex problem, it is suggested that Derrida's thought provides means by which acts of resistance may be further radicalised, as they are conceived of and enacted, by adding to them second- and third-order onto-political critiques—namely of the resistance-act itself and the agent or actor of resistance herself—intended to pull away from such ontologisation. The paper argues that such second- and third-order critiques can have at least three politically radical consequences: an insistence on the limitlessness of responsibility which takes seriously the urgency of the political; the politicisation of intervention precisely as a consequence of its ultimate indefensibility; and the self-conscious attempt of the subject to interrogate and thereby endeavour to (re)write herself in light of the aforementioned. It thus proposes a different kind of subject of resistance to Gramscian counter-hegemonic movements and the Foucauldian practitioner of counter-conduct, that is, an auto-deconstructionist actor committed to viewing her own subjecthood, as well as her concrete interventions,<sup>2</sup> as a site of political struggle.

The paper begins by providing a brief overview of the prevailing Gramscian and Foucauldian approaches to the study of resistance, specifically as regards their respective framings of the subject or agent of resistance. Having provided this contextualisation, the discussion then turns to developing an account of the ways in which deconstruction provides salient means by which a form of resistance more resistant to its cooptation into forms of global ordering might function, drawing directly from Derrida's texts as well as from the work of scholars who utilise his thought. The paper finally turns to the crucial question of the concrete consequences of such a deconstructive mode of political resistance; countering the well-rehearsed charges that deconstruction is of significance only at the level of the philosophical or metaphysical (a claim which vastly underestimates the degree to which theory and practice—thought and action—are profoundly intertwined), a discussion of some of the substantive praxiological implications of deconstruction at the level of concrete intervention is provided via a brief engagement with feminist, queer, and post-colonial political sites. The core claim made in the paper is that inasmuch as deconstruction attempts to interrupt forms of thinking and knowing right up to and including processes of conscious and unconscious subjectification, it can

provide valuable means by which the micro-gestures of onto-politics can be resisted at the (fundamentally interrelated) levels of both thought and concrete praxis. Challenging the limitations of both a Gramscian and Foucauldian reading of the subject or agent of resistance, it is argued that deconstruction can help one conceptualise modes of subject-becoming and political intervention which both take seriously their own indefensibility and violence in the context of a post-foundational political landscape and insist upon active and interventionary, if ultimately indefensible and therefore explicitly politicised, forms of radical praxis.

### **Conceptualising Deconstruction as a form of Political Resistance**

Amongst other differences, what divides the prevailing Gramscian and Foucauldian approaches to the study of resistance in global politics is their respective accounts of the subject of resistance, the persons or groups conceptualised as the agents of dissent. The former, Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguashca suggest, has proceeded by '[d]eploying the concept of "social movements" or "forces" and situating them in the realm of "civil society"'. These actors, they continue, are characterised as

'counter-hegemonic' to the extent that they reflect a collective will and seek to overturn class forms of oppression. We suggest that, for Gramscians, such movements embody alliances of diverse forces which transcend different ways of being and understanding, unite distinct realms of subjectivity around the interests of subordinated classes and reflect shared truths and goals. (2007, p. 292)

In Gramscian approaches, in other words, the subject of resistance is presented as more or less united collective social and political groupings, which intervene to pursue their interests in the political sphere.

This conceptualisation of the subject of dissent has been challenged by, amongst others, James C. Scott in his articulation of infrapolitical resistances 'which fall short of openly declared contestation' (Mittleman & Chin, 2005, p. 22), Roland Bleiker via his examination of 'networks of anti-discipline' and 'everyday forms of resistance' (2000, p. 200) and anarchist-inspired engagements with a range of contemporary resistance movements (Day, 2004; Rosedale, 2010). Similarly, scholars drawing explicitly on Foucault, Eschle and Maiguashca suggest, have voiced suspicion of the 'erasures entailed in narratives of identity and unity', emphasising instead 'the transitory and contingent nature of activist politics', and 'eschew[ing] the term 'social movement' in favour of concepts seen as less homogenising'. Importantly, they note, from such a Foucauldian vantage point, 'there is no unified subject performing acts of resistance; rather resistance acts are constitutive of an always incomplete subject' (2007, p. 292). At stake in this debate is the question of the complexities and complicities of the subject or agent of resistance; the Gramscian framing of an oppositional relation of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces both homogenises actors within resistance movements and underestimates the implications of their embeddedness within power relations. While it concurs with this Foucauldian critique, this paper suggests that a turn to Derrida's thought can provide avenues which help resist the reinscription of resistance back into forms of global ordering which the former cannot.

Derrida's thought enjoys considerable influence in the critical literature within the discipline of Global Politics. The many ways in which it is of significance for the study of the political have been elucidated at length by, amongst others, Arfi (2012), Bulley (2009, 2007, pp. 128–142), Campbell (1998a, 1998b), Dillon (2007, pp. 80–96, 2010, pp. 191–207, 2013), Edkins (1999, pp. 65–86, 2007, pp. 172–192), Fagan (2013), Hirst (2013a, pp. 120–197, 2013b), O'Callaghan (2012), Pinkerton (2012), Vaughan-Williams (2007), and Zehfuss (2002, pp. 196–249, 2007, pp. 97–111, 2009). It is not, accordingly, the intention of this paper to set out an extensive overview of the fundamentals of deconstruction or Derrida's oeuvre more broadly. Instead, the aim here is to respond to the specific problem of the reappropriation of resistance back into the folds of global ordering, or, more properly, to demonstrate how this reinscription of resistance might itself be resisted, utilising elements of Derrida's thought.

The question of such reinscription has played a central role in the ongoing debates which ensued following the events of 1968 between leftist movements of various denominations, both within and beyond the academy. Deconstruction has been widely criticised in these exchanges, not least for its apparent failure to provide a concrete platform from which an actor or agent may enact political interventions; the charge levelled has been that in undermining the political, ethical, and ontological foundations assumed to be necessary for radical intervention, deconstruction leads to immobilisation, acquiescence to the status quo, and/or relativism and nihilism. Pragmatists like Richard Rorty, for instance, have argued that deconstruction has

done little for leftist politics. On the contrary, by diverting attention from real politics, it has helped create a self-satisfied and insular academic left which—like the left of the 1960s—prides itself on not being co-opted by the system and thereby renders itself less able to improve the system. (1996, p.15)

Similarly, many associated with the Marxian tradition, such as Terry Eagleton, have accused practitioners of deconstruction of indulging in a form of bourgeois *jouissance* in which 'political quietism and compromise are preserved' as a consequence of 'a dispersal of the subject so radical as to render it impotent as any kind of agent at all, least of all a revolutionary one' (1981, pp. 137–138). In such readings, deconstruction quickly slips back into propping up the status quo by removing any defensible platform from which to enact resistance.

Eagleton's critique provides, however, a useful platform from which to begin to elucidate an alternative account of deconstruction in which it can be viewed as having purchase in the context of political resistance. On the one hand, deconstruction can, he argues, be read as an

extraordinarily modest proposal: a sort of patient, probing reformism of the text, which is not, so to speak, to be confronted over the barricades but cunningly waylaid in the corridors and suavely chivvied into revealing its ideological hand. Stoically convinced of the unbreakable grip of metaphysical closure, the deconstructionist, like any responsible trade union bureaucrat confronting management, must settle for that and negotiate what he or she can within the left-overs and stray contingencies casually unabsorbed by the textual power system. (1981, p. 134)

In this reading, deconstruction's interventionary potential is limited in advance because the metaphysical structures and strictures characteristic of Western political thought and praxis leave

only the possibility of surface-level reform. Deriving from and reproducing the 'blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968', post-structuralism in general, according to Eagleton, found itself unable to 'break the structures of state power', and turned instead to the task of 'subverting the structures of language' (1996, p. 123). What ensues in the case of deconstruction in particular, he claims, is that 'the Maoist "cultural revolution" is naively transplanted to the arena of language, so that political revolution becomes implicitly equated with some ceaseless disruption and overturning' (1991, p. 197). The ultimate consequence of this is a process of emptying out of both the subject and object of political thought; Anglo-American deconstruction amounts, for Eagleton, to 'a power game, a mirror-image of orthodox academic competition. It is just that now ... victory is achieved by kenosis or self-emptying: the winner is the one who has managed to get rid of all his cards and sit with empty hands' (1996, p. 127). The implication of this is that deconstruction 'practices a mode of self-destruction that leaves it as invulnerable as an empty page. As such, it merely rehearses in different terms a gesture common to all ideology: it attempts to vanquish its antagonist while leaving itself unscathed' (1981, p. 136). Such a process offers little by way of politicised intervention.

On the other hand, however, Eagleton suggests that to frame it as such

ignores the other fact of deconstruction which is its hair-raising radicalism – the nerve and daring with which it knocks the stuffing out of every smug concept and leaves the well-groomed text shamefully dishevelled. It ignores, in short, the madness and violence of deconstruction, its scandalous urge to think the unthinkable, the flamboyance with which it poses itself on the very brink of meaning and dances there, pounding away at the crumbling cliff-edge beneath its feet and prepared to fall with it into the sea of unlimited semiosis or schizophrenia. (1981, p. 134, emphases in original)

Such an intervention is, for Eagleton, 'ultra-leftist'; because 'texts', understood as both written artefacts and concrete socio-political configurations, are 'power systems', the deconstructionist 'must track a cat-and-mouse game within and across them without ever settling for either signifier or signified' (1981, p. 134). In this reading, deconstruction's radicalism consists in its capacity to substantively and tirelessly interrupt prevailing conceptual and praxiological modes of operating. In Derrida's words, the effect of this is to instigate 'the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom' (cited in Bowman, 2010, p. 39). Amongst other things, what such a response poses is the question of what it is in 'us' that seeks such a stable or defensible platform from which to enact political intervention.

What is interesting about this dual framing is that it points to the possibility, on the one hand, that deconstruction, read as the continuous reflection upon, and evaluation of, norms, assumptions, and principles, is not really a big ask; any critical position worthy of the name should be engaging in reflexive auto-critique as a matter of course in order to respond to its inevitable shortcomings, exclusions, and oversights. On the other hand, the radicalism of deconstruction, Eagleton shows, consists in the scope, depth, and endurance of such auto-critique. Far from simply an isolated instance or contained process, deconstruction is interminable, never ceasing, and insists that no claim, assumption, or principle is to be viewed as given or unproblematic, no matter how apparently praiseworthy. Even as political interventions are conceptualised and performed, a deconstructive engagement insists upon reflecting again, challenging again the grounds upon which an action was

taken, and making any certitude of one's correctness ultimately impossible. As will be shown below, however, the absence of such 'correctness' is in many ways a salutary, as opposed to debilitating, political moment.

This raises a second important question, namely that of the animating drive or momentum of deconstruction; if the grounds upon which one can base a political intervention have been fundamentally shaken, it is legitimate to ask what is it that animates deconstruction's ceaseless movements. On the one hand, both Derrida and many utilising his thought suggest that deconstruction can be described as always already in motion due to its relation to an undeconstructable otherness to which one is always already responsible: 'Once you relate to the other as the other, then something incalculable comes on the scene... That is what gives deconstruction its movement' (2006, pp. 17–18). Derrida frames this as springing from a relation to justice: 'Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law' (2006, p. 16). In other words, deconstruction finds 'its "force, its movement or its motivation" in the "always unsatisfied appeal" to justice' (Bowman, 2010, pp. 43–44, citing Protevi). Such momentum is similarly framed by John Caputo in terms of a faith (2006, p. 165), or a 'nameless love' (2006, p. 173). The imperative that emanates from this relation to otherness is, Derrida suggests elsewhere, so significant that no other authoring force of deconstruction is necessary: 'the insistence on unbinding..., on the irreducibility of difference is so massive as to need no further insistence' (1998, p. 27). The aporia underpinning deconstruction, he argues, 'is just what impels deconstruction, what rouses it out of bed in the morning, what drives it on and calls it into action' (2006, p. 32).

Whether framed as emanating from an always unsatisfied appeal to justice, faith, love, or aporia, what these accounts share is the sense that deconstruction 'happens' as a consequence of the relation to otherness, that the authorising force 'is' this relation. This is, perhaps, the deconstruction of the 'to come', the deconstruction associated with the messianic promise made most explicit in Derrida's later work; in Caputo's framing, the 'import and the impulse, the drive and desire of deconstruction is not cognitive or constative but performative; deconstruction is not matter of knowing or seeing, but of believing...[,] driven by a faith in the impossible and undeconstructible' (2006, p. 166).

In contrast to this, on the other hand, Derrida and numerous scholars employing his ideas frame deconstruction as requiring a more explicit and deliberate intervention on the part of an actor or subject. In Bowman's framing, deconstruction 'has no power of its own' (2010, p. 38). Derrida similarly states that far from simply 'happening', deconstruction must be enacted: 'deconstruction is "yes", is linked to the "yes", is an affirmation' (cited in Caputo, 2006, p. 27).<sup>3</sup> As such, an active effort on the part of an agent is assumed; rather than springing solely from a relation to otherness, deconstruction is an interventionary process requiring constant work. Far from it occurring spontaneously as a consequence of the relation to otherness, one must try to find, for instance, the heterogeneity in texts (Derrida, 2006, p. 9). This necessitates an 'incessant vigilance about the doors that are constantly being shut by the "possible"' (Caputo, 2006, p. 134); as such it relies on an endless series of interventions on the part of an actor, a ceaseless resistance to the ever-present appropriations of the onto-political.

This is crucial in the context of resistance because it is precisely the commitment made on the part of the subject which makes possible the resistances deconstruction pertains to. To rely on the assumption that deconstruction simply 'happens' within the text, occurs spontaneously as a consequence of a relation to otherness, profoundly underestimates the struggle required to attempt to ceaselessly resist the micro-disciplinary ensnarements of the onto-political at intertwined levels of thought and the concrete political sphere. It further underemphasises the degree to which deconstruction is itself a violent and even fraught enterprise: in Derrida's words, deconstruction involves a 'sufferance': 'what makes it suffer and what makes those it torments suffer is perhaps the absence of rules, of norms, of definitive criteria that would allow one to distinguish unequivocally between droit and justice' (1992, p. 4).

I would argue that this latter reading of deconstruction as interwoven with struggle, experienced through the violence of the indefensible, is of much greater value in the context of conceptualising resistance than is the former messianic vision; as I and others have argued elsewhere (Hirst, 2013b; Houseman, 2013), insofar as the 'death of God'<sup>4</sup> precludes the possibility of an authoring 'Alter', and the horrors of Auschwitz and countless past and contemporary political violences situate the beatific hopefulness of the messianic promise beyond the bounds even of irony, such a promise is problematic at best. It may be that such a messianic framing of deconstruction informs Eagleton's important challenge that, 'in a world groaning in agony, where the very future of humankind hangs by a hair, there is something objectionably luxurious about deconstruction' (1981, p. 140). Simply put, one cannot wait for deconstruction to simply unfold before one's eyes; the urgency of the political demands an active, even fraught mode of engagement, in which the subject or agent proceeds with her own irredeemable violence in the forefront of her account of herself in a bid to write and rewrite herself anew in light of the political landscape encountered. Accordingly, the paper now turns to Derrida's thought in order to develop an account of how such a deconstructive mode of resistance might function.

### **Derrida and Political Resistance**

While Derrida's oeuvre is vast, explicit references to the concept of resistance are few. The account of a deconstructive mode of resistance provided here, accordingly, focuses primarily on the works in which the issue is most directly addressed. In *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, Derrida begins his account of the concept of resistance by marking his love of the signifier: 'Ever since I can remember, I have always loved this word'. He continues:

This word... resonated in my desire and my imagination as the most beautiful word in the politics and history of this country, this word loaded with all the pathos of my nostalgia, as if, at any cost, I would like not to have missed blowing up trains, tanks, and headquarters between 1940 and 1945... Why have I always dreamed of resistance? (Derrida, 1998, p. 2)<sup>5</sup>

Paul Bowman takes up this question of why one might dream of resistance, noting a number of potential dangers associated with the concept. He identifies, first, a Žižekian reading in which "politics" and "resistance" might be regarded as alibis covering a drive to repeat certain gestures (such as "politicizing" or "seeking resistance") rather than anything like an "authentic" desire to



make a change' (2010, p. 47. Emphasis in original). Such a drive has more to do with the generation of particular forms of jouissance than it does substantive political intervention.

Bowman similarly notes the pessimism of Baudrillard and Adorno, both of whom might take 'the possibility of an intimate intertwining or wedlock between power and resistance to mean that oppositional resistance per se is "always already negated by the structure of the entity which it wishes to oppose"' (2010, p. 48, citing Docherty, 1993, p. 322). It is easy, he continues, to move from this position to the conclusion of Bourdieu and Wacquant that 'the very idea of resistance... is simply a fetish concept which demonstrates a profound misrecognition and delusion of the part of those who "buy into it"'; in this reading, 'dreams of resistance are really only resistant dreams. Those involved in cultural theory may (claim to) dream of resistance, but that doesn't mean that anything is actually being resisted. Claiming to resist is not necessarily to resist' (2010, p. 49, emphases in original). Derrida is, of course, mindful of this: in Bowman's terms, Derrida shows that 'even resistance organised by explicit appeal to the idea of (its own) freedom may not be free or self-determining and may instead be entirely overdetermined, symptomatic—possibly even more an expression of the power that is ostensibly being resisted than something independently resistant or alter-native' (2010, p. 48. Emphasis in original). Nevertheless, Derrida risks elucidating his self-identified 'idiomatic', even 'idiosyncratic', interest in the concept of resistance in the context of psychoanalytic theory.

Psychoanalysis, Derrida suggests, can be understood as 'analysis of resistance' insofar as the manifestations of resistance enacted both consciously and unconsciously by the analysand to the treatment offered by the analyst lay bare the limitations of, and violences immanent to, the latter. In his exploration of Freud's commentary on the problem of resistance to psychoanalysis, he is concerned, in his words, 'with something other than analysis, a certain analysis, something that, in another sense, perhaps, resists analysis, a certain analysis' (1998, p. 5). Derrida traces this 'something other' through a series of different forms of resistance to psychoanalysis; he shows that Freud identified five distinct registers at which resistance operates, which emanate variously from the ego, the id, and the superego, but suggests that the most enduring and resilient resistances are associated with the repetition compulsion and function at the level of the unconscious (1998, p. 23). This 'something other' which prompts such resistances is read by Derrida as interrupting psychoanalysis's claim to internal coherence, self-sameness, and reasonableness. This is because it transpires that the only means by which resistances can be finally overcome are non-rational, affective, and emotive; in Andrea Hurst's framing, Freud

acknowledges that resistances can be nonrational, which means that struggles against them have to mobilize forces other than those of rational enlightenment... In other words, to persuade analysands to accept interpretations, analysts are required to capitalize on the emotional dynamics of a 'poleros', that is, the polemics and erotics of resistance, power, and authority ... (2008, p. 172)

It is this 'something other' that connects the notion of resistance to the movements of deconstruction. Just as this force sabotages the imposition of order and stability of narrative on the part of the analyst in the context of psychoanalysis, so too does the deconstructive imperative resist the instantiation of totality in the sphere of the onto-political. Oliver Marchart describes something similar in his framing of the distinction between 'politics', understood as a particular set of

instantiated socio-political arrangements, and 'the political', understood as something other which inexorably exceeds and disrupts these forms of ordering as a consequence of the exclusions and violences of any configuration of 'politics' (2007).

The nature of this sabotaging 'something other' at work in both resistance to psychoanalysis and a deconstructive political ethos can be discerned through an elucidation of the relationship between Foucault's and Derrida's respective approaches to resistance. For Foucault, as Jenny Edkins and Veronique Pin-Fat show, 'relations of power entail resistance: they would not count as relations of power were resistance not present' (2004, p. 5). As such, resistance is immanent to the structures of global order for Foucault in a manner not dissimilar to Derrida's identification of a resistant 'something other' always already at work within psychoanalysis; in both accounts, resistance is contained within and always already part of the relational ordering processes at work.

Similarly, Foucault and Derrida share in certain respects a commitment to genealogy as a mode of resistance. According to Roland Bleiker, genealogies 'trace the processes by which we have come to accept our world as natural or meaningful'; they are

historical investigations into the ideas and events that have shaped our thinking, speaking and acting... [They] focus on the process by which we have constructed origins and given meaning to particular representations of the past, representations that continuously guide our daily lives and set clear limits to political and social options.

Genealogies thus enact resistance because 'questions of agency are above all questions of power relations. And power relations are best understood, Michel Foucault argues convincingly, by examining specific attempts that are made to uproot them' (2000, pp. 25–26). Differently put, what is suggested here is that by conducting a genealogical exploration into specific configurations of power relations via an examination of forms of dissent, the political fault lines inherent to such relations are exposed and thereby (potentially or actually) challenged. Such forms of counter-writing can provide alternative accounts of particular power relations which expose and address the hierarchies, silences, and exclusions of prevailing historical and contemporary socio-political arrangements, and these can be used to conceptualise interventions intended to resist them.

Deconstruction shares with Foucauldian genealogy a commitment to such conceptual and concrete disturbances: in Derrida's words, deconstruction is 'always a matter of undoing, desedimenting, decomposing, deconstituting sediments, artefacta, presuppositions, institutions'. To this degree, he explains, deconstruction may be read as a 'critico-genealogical return' (1998, p. 27. Emphases in original). Deconstruction, he claims, follows the logic of the dual meaning of the word 'analysis': it 'undeniably obeys an analytical exigency, at once critical and analytic'. What emerges, he continues, is both an 'archeological or anagogical motif... and the philolytic motif of the dissociative—always very close to the saying dis-social—unbinding' (1998, p. 27. Emphases in original). In other words, what Derrida identifies here is the dimension of deconstruction which shares a good deal with genealogy's commitment to an excavation and reinterpretation of the past and/or present in a manner which intervenes so as to denaturalise dominant social understandings and forces.

At this stage, however, Derrida appends a footnote which stipulates that 'the necessity of this genealogy must always be complicated by a 'counter-genealogy'. Simple genealogy always risks privileging the archeo-genetic motif, or even the at least symbolic schema of filiation, family, or

national origin' (1998, n. 8, p. 120). While I would not use the word 'simple' in the context of Foucault's genealogical interventions, Derrida's comment highlights a crucial issue at stake in processes of counter-writing and counter-conduct. In his words, deconstruction 'radicalizes at the same time its axiomatics and the critique of its axiomatics'. What this entails is 'a movement of deconstruction that is not only counter-archeological but counter-genealogical'. This is because 'the deconstructive necessity drives one to put into question even this principle of self-presence in the unity of consciousness', (1998, pp. 27–28. Emphasis in original) upon which the construction of a genealogy depends. In other words, through deconstruction, critique extends not only to the object or issue prompting the initial genealogical re-writing but also, at the same time, to both any alternative story told and, indeed, the author or subject of any such alternative narrative.

The extension of critique to such second- and third-order sites is necessary because however apparently politically laudable the intervention, one cannot engage in a project of genealogical counter-writing or counter-conduct without enacting a privileging of a particular subject position and, consequently, a necessarily violent rendering of the objects in question. As such, as Paul Patton notes, genealogy may thus be read as a 'first step' in deconstruction (2007, p. 768), but beyond this first-order engagement, both the alternative account provided and the agent herself must also be put into question. This is because any alternative history or conceptual apparatus as such risks becoming its own totalising gesture, one as problematic as the last; the intention is to resist the possibility that the critico-genealogical intervention itself becomes consolidated into a new prevailing account, as blind as was the last to its own exclusions, hierarchies, and violences. This gesture adds, I would submit, a further radical intervention which genealogy alone cannot provide. Michael Dillon suggests something similar in his statement that an interrogation of the politics of security

requires something in addition to genealogy as well; because genealogy, however politicising it might be – Foucault arguing, powerfully, that this politicising takes place for, or rather around, the battle over truth as 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' – does not directly pose and seek to think the question of the political as such. (1996, p. 22)

Without an accompanying series of counter-genealogical interruptions, any genealogy proffered, in other words, is implicated in precisely the politics of ontological totalisation and closure which underpin the historical or political phenomena genealogical counter-writing seeks to challenge. In attending to these second- and third-level critiques—of the alternative narrative and the narrator, respectively—deconstruction thus enacts a further form of onto-political resistance. This neither serves to undermine or destroy such interventions, nor does it entail the immobilisation of the subject; rather, it insists upon critique and reflexivity at the same moment as political interventions are being constructed and enacted.

In insisting on these second- and third-order critiques in addition to the original act of counter-writing, deconstruction can be framed as a 'principle of interminable analysis: an axiom of interminability, perhaps' (Derrida, 1998, p. 33). Simply put, the deconstructive imperative amounts to a commitment to disrupting processes of conceptual or ontological unification wherever they occur, whether within institutions of global ordering or within one's own discourse; for Derrida, if there were a sole thesis of deconstruction 'it would pose divisibility: difference as divisibility';

because 'there is no indivisible element or simple origin ... analysis is interminable' (1998, pp. 33–34). In its commitment to ceaselessly unpicking the apparent internal coherence of prevailing forces of material and conceptual ordering, which are at work within one's own attempts to enact resistance as much as within concrete processes of global politics, deconstruction performs a 'hyperanalyticism': it amounts to 'a hyperbolicism of analysis that takes sometimes, in certain people's eyes, the form of hyperdiabolicism' (1998, p. 29).

Such a hyperanalytic mode of engagement is both paradoxical and crucial because,

in order to prevent the critique of originarism in its transcendental or ontological, analytic or dialectical form from yielding, according to the law that we well know, to empiricism or positivism, it was necessary to accede, in a still more radical, more analytical fashion, to the traditional demand, to the very law which had just been deconstructed. (1998, p. 29)

In other words, deconstruction paradoxically mobilises the very analytical and conceptual tools which it itself has already identified as divisible and deconstructible in order to challenge both these tools and resist the traditions of thought and praxis they derive from. For Bowman, deconstruction thus amounts to a process of 'literalisation'; it simply looks for 'that which is claimed or assumed to be real, present, actual or true (such as the notions of presence, justice, responsibility, univocal truth, etc). In looking, it reveals that these are both undecidable and yet forcefully imposed, in contingent constitutional forms' (Bowman, 2010, p. 39). But it insists that such looking be constantly undertaken both at the level of processes of global ordering and within one's own attempts to enact resistance to such ordering. The radicalism of such an extensive critical imperative is suggested by Adorno: such thought

as such, before all particular contents, is an act of negation, of resistance to that which is forced upon it; this is what thought has inherited from its archetype, the relation between labor and material... The effort implied in the concept of thought itself, as a counterpart to passive contemplation, is negative already – a revolt against being importuned to bow to every immediate thing. (2004, p. 19)

As this suggests, the reason such second- and third-order resistances are necessary relates to the question of violence.

Deconstruction attempts to render explicit and address the violence which is immanent to political thought and praxis as such. In Adorno's terms,

[w]hile doing violence to the object of its synthesis, our thinking heeds a potential that waits in the object, and it unconsciously obeys the idea of making amends to the pieces for what it has done... [T]he resistance of thought to mere things in being, the commanding freedom of the subject, intends in the object even that of which the object was deprived by its objectification. (2004, p. 19)<sup>6</sup>

What this means is that a form of resistance which comprises second- and third-order critiques, as opposed to a single gesture of supposedly correct intervention, can better attend to, expose, and attempt to ameliorate the violent exclusions that necessarily accompany it.

A prevailing response to such a deconstructive imperative has been to insist that radical politics requires 'constructive', positive interventions and activities, not an endless picking apart of these; as Noys relays, it is claimed that 'the micro-politics of deconstruction can never pass to a constructive stage of building or creating radical alternatives...' (2012, p. 29). It is assumed in this reading, in other words, that deconstruction amounts to fruitless process of undermining intervention and a cyclical pattern of disruption which ultimately leads nowhere. On the contrary, however, these movements are precisely productive and generative of substantive political interventions; much as when an issue or concept is discussed in a classroom without ultimate resolution, or a text read which challenges one's views without offering an immediate ready solution, the consequence of a deconstructive engagement is not stasis and silence, but rather a sparking of fresh reflections, a rethinking and reimagining which itself amounts and makes possible further generative and productive acts, even if the ground upon which one bases such interventions has become decidedly shakier. Consequently, far from ineffectual, deconstruction is 'the act of taking a position, in the very work it does with regard to the political-institutional structures that constitute and govern our practices, our competences, and our performances' (Derrida, cited in Elam, 1994, p. 90). It remains to provide some specific examples of such deconstructive political praxis.

### **Deconstruction as Political Praxis**

There are many manifestations of the practical consequences of deconstructive resistance across a range of academic disciplines and activist sites. Drawing on the work of scholars and activists who have explicitly linked their radical political projects to deconstruction, whether through endorsing or critiquing it, this section provides two accounts of deconstruction read as a form of activism, followed by a brief snapshot of three examples of its praxiological utility in the contexts of feminist, queer, and post-colonial political interventions. Crucially, I am not trying to claim for deconstruction the successes of these latter movements, nor am I suggesting that the actors involved by any means do or should self-identify as proponents of deconstruction. To do so would be a crude and colonising appropriation. Rather, the point made is that the movements and interventions discussed share with deconstruction a commitment to disrupting prevailing norms and assumptions reflective of the second- and third-order critiques outlined above, specifically as regards problematising essentialised or naturalised agents of resistance.

One pertinent account of the concrete consequences of deconstruction is provided by Martin McQuillan. He suggests it can be conceptualised as a form of 'textual activism': in deconstruction's movements, he argues, 'an intervention takes place (a textual activism) which produces the movement, history and becoming of a necessary political analysis which links the political to critical thought today' (2008, p. 6). This is because

deconstruction (unlike philosophy) reads. Such reading qua reading does not generalise from the exemplary but accepts the challenge of the exemplary to thought as an articulation of the troubling otherness which presents itself as an arrival in reading. Reading in this sense has very little to do with the quiet spaces of university libraries... Rather, this reading is an interminable, unconditional critical liveliness to the world around us, its histories and its futures. (2008, p. 6–7)

In elucidating this notion of textual activism, McQuillan makes the point that deconstruction intervenes not simply at the level of thought or philosophy but rather in ways which have substantive material effects. Simply put, this is because the ways we think have a direct bearing on the ways we act; in the post-9/11 world,

the stupefaction and mystification of domestic thought is inseparable from the military violence which is only one aspect of this world-wide struggle. Thus, critical reason and deconstruction are more important now than ever and this textual activism will be affiliated in unpredictable ways... to the material processes of the political. (2008, p. 9)

McQuillan emphasises here the extent to which 'textual' readings and interventions are by no means dissociable from the concrete sphere of global politics. While certainly not their sole origin or source, socio-political framings and discourses of war and militarism in the post-9/11 world clearly functioned to provide the conceptual foundations and parameters without which the justifications proffered by statespersons in the USA and elsewhere for the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan could not have been convincing or indeed intelligible. Many scholars of global politics using Derrida's thought have made similar points in a range of empirical contexts (Arfi, 2012; Bulley, 2009; Edkins, 1999; Fagan, Glorieux, Hašimbegović, & Suetsugu, 2007; Zehfuss, 2002).

Concurrently, Paul Bowman frames deconstruction as a form of 'martial art'. He suggests that 'although Derrida mainly read and wrote (monstrously faithfully) about "mere" philosophical texts, these texts are to be understood as "indices of real history", produced by and productive of particular biases: effects that have effects' (2010, p. 38). This analogy emerges in part from the embeddedness of deconstruction in relations of violence: it is 'construed as responding to challenges, intimately attentive, listening, sticking, yielding, inverting and displacing, always patient, calm and adaptive' (2010, p. 40) in a manner reflective of martial arts, particularly t'ai chi. Bowman elaborates on parallel misreadings of deconstruction and t'ai chi as 'philosophical, isolated, inward-looking, navel-gazing: as not really real'; both are framed as 'digressions away from reality, truth, and direct, practical engagement' (2010, p. 41). However, like t'ai chi, deconstruction has, he demonstrates, a series of concrete praxiological implications. For instance, deconstruction makes possible a form of engagement with political antagonists which emphasises 'listening': in contrast to simply denouncing and dismissing interlocutors, deconstruction 'listens by sticking to the other... Derrida listened, stuck and yielded to the texts and institutions of philosophy, in order to invert and displace conceptual orders and foci' (2010, p. 44). Bowman suggests that in academic contexts, this might mean, for instance, seeking to publish in journals other than those reflecting one's own disciplinary and ethico-political commitments, dealing with difference in terms and contexts other than the familiar.

The practical consequences of such deconstructive resistance can be seen in a host of political sites. To take the example, first, of feminist political struggles, Diane Elam, for instance, suggests that feminism and deconstruction can usefully be read alongside each another because,

[o]n the one hand, feminism shifts the ground of the political, interrogating the opposition between the public and the private spheres. On the other hand, deconstruction displaces our understanding of how theory relates to practice by rethinking the opposition of philosophical reflection to political action. (1994, p. 1)

Elam connects the rise of deconstruction to the rise of third-wave feminism, posing the question: 'must feminism always seek to erase difference by giving birth to a family of identical daughters who all fight for the same causes, who all pretend to share the same feminist goals?' (1994, p. 73). In third-wave feminism's de-essentialisation of the category 'woman', forms of intervention which insist upon the inclusion of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in the forms of intervention they proffer have emerged, something which, as Elam shows, has hugely important consequences for issues such as the representation of women in institutions of government, abortion, past configurations of conjugal rights, gay marriage, and the gendered and Westerncentric writing of history, psychoanalysis, and philosophy.

To the anxieties espoused by those worried that problematising the category 'woman' spells disaster for the feminist project, Elam replies:

this is not the same thing as being condemned to the land of relativistic nihilism, where political action—or any action for that matter—becomes impossible. Uncertainty... is neither an absolute obstacle to action nor a theoretical bar to political praxis. (1994, p. 31)

Such interventionism is reflected in Elam's formulation of the notion of 'groundless solidarity', a form of solidarity 'which is not based on identity' but relies rather upon 'a coalition built around suspicion of identity as the essential grounding for meaningful political action' (1994, p. 69). She suggests, in short, that 'the gains of feminism have produced a situation in which the meta-narrative of the affirmation of female identity has foundered precisely because its realization can only be imperialist'. Consequently, she continues, feminism and deconstruction work similarly towards challenging such essentialism: such an endeavour entails 'endless work, an abyssal politics...' (1994, p. 120). This example shows how the problematisation of foundational claims about sex and gender has led not to the death of feminism but rather to a form of feminism committed to interrogating its own past and present exclusions and violences such that it can better resist (although by no means entirely avoid) reperforming conventional forms of onto-political ordering in its theoretical and concrete interventions.

Concurrently, in the context of queer activism and queer theory, Joshua Gamson explores the controversies which ensued following the announcement made in San Francisco that the 1993 pride celebrations were to be named the 'Year of the Queer'. For many, the signifier 'queer', Gamson shows, 'shakes the ground on which gay and lesbian politics has been built[,]... haphazardly attempting to build a politics from the rubble of deconstructed collective categories' (1995, p. 390). From this, Gamson notes, a series of dilemmas emerge regarding 'for whom, when, and how are stable collective identities necessary for social action and social change?... When and how might deconstructive strategies take aim at institutional forms [of oppression]'. What occurred in the shift towards embracing the signifier 'queer', he suggests, was a process of de-essentialisation, the very fracturing nature of which was politically salutary:

Queer movements pose the challenge of a form of organizing in which, far from inhibiting accomplishments, the destabilization of collective identity is itself a goal and accomplishment of collective action. When this dynamic is taken into account, new questions arise. (Gamson, 1995, p. 403, emphasis in original)

As Gamson shows, the integration of transgender and bisexual issues into the sphere of debate represents a concrete effect of such a process of de-essentialisation. Thus, in challenging the contours and parameters of subject of resistance, the queer movement displays an imperative similar to the generative effects of a deconstructive mode of resistance.

To turn, finally, to post-colonial politics, Michael Syrotinski has explored what he frames as the 'uneasy encounter between deconstruction and the postcolonial' (2007, p. 2). He argues that for some, such as Robert Young, 'Derrida's work has always, even if somewhat indirectly, challenged the ethico-political tensions at the heart of colonialist ideology' (2007, p. 11). For Alberto Moreiras, the two traditions, Syrotinski notes, share the view that 'in order to wrest the possibility of a political affirmation from its continual foreclosure, we require a double articulation, akin to Spivak's "strategic essentialism" and Derrida's "double inscription"' (2007, p. 36). For others, however, he continues, Derrida 'is ultimately a representative of the Western philosophical tradition he is deconstructing, and... deconstruction is therefore at best a-political and a-historical, and at worst complicitous with a certain theoretical imperialism' (2007, p. 12). This raises the question of the Eurocentric and colonising dimensions of deconstructive thought itself. In particular, as Mustapha Pasha, amongst others, has shown, there is a danger in many prevailing critical-theoretical traditions that the insistence of putting into relief all forms of individual and collective identity in a similar manner assumes a general condition of post-foundational subjectivity and its consequences, a move which effaces other onto-political configurations (2011; 2013). As a form of engagement based on problematising its own as well as others' interventions, deconstruction can and must respond to its own violences, exclusions, and reinscriptions of hierarchy, and view such critique as a matter of urgency. In insisting on second- and third-order critiques, deconstruction impels its agent to pursue forms of auto-critique which problematise such potential colonialisms to the fullest extent possible, which is to say interminably, and without final resolution.

To restate, I am emphatically not suggesting that the radical political changes associated with third-wave feminism, queer movements, or post-colonial politics can or should be subsumed within, or be conceived of as derivative of or synonymous with, Derrida's thought or deconstruction as a philosophical tradition. Rather, the claim made is that the sites of political intervention mentioned here share with deconstruction, as I have framed it in this paper, a commitment to attempting to resist the hierarchies and exclusions associated with of prevailing forms of ordering by disrupting apparently stable categories and assumptions, in particular as regards problematising the subject or agent of resistance herself.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that there are a series of ways in which deconstruction contains the potential to resist resistance's cooptation back into interrelated processes of conceptual and global ordering. Such a form of resistance can be framed as occurring at three interconnected registers. First, as Eagleton's account of its pursuit of 'every smug concept' suggests, deconstruction's radicalism consists in its resistance to the possibility, or rather its highlighting of the violence of any claim to the possibility, of asserting defensibly that a particular issue or problem is not of concern or falls 'outside' the bounds of one's responsibility. Inasmuch as deconstruction highlights violence, its imperative is to identify and disrupt processes of totalisation wherever they occur. That one cannot



attend to even a fraction of such processes adequately does not absolve one of this responsibility; this state of affairs comprises only a further layer of violence for which one cannot atone. Any claims to legitimate borders which demarcate the limits of responsibility are themselves subject to deconstructive reflection, and their necessarily forceful imposition demonstrated thereby. Such an intervention proceeds on the basis that responsibility is limitless, following the logic of both Emmanuel Levinas and Derrida. The all-too-common refusal of such limitless responsibility is thereby called into question, and all possible justifications exposed as indefensible. As such, the urgency of political intervention is reemphasised.

As this suggests, second, a deconstructive engagement is radically, if paradoxically, politicising. When the possibility of being finally 'correct' or 'just' is removed in the context of the subject's political deliberations, that is, when it is acknowledged that one's political interventions are inexorably violent, that one can only choose between violence and violence, the subject is obliged to consider the very difficult question of what s/he would intervene for or against, whether in concrete political practice or more conceptually, in spite of its ultimate indefensibility. Far from resulting in immobilisation or fatalistic resignation, this encounter with the indefensible can serve to allow the subject to encounter the violence of his/her position and commit to it nevertheless. That no position can be ultimately unproblematically correct does not mean that 'anything goes' or that 'nothing matters'; rather, this aporetic condition means that the course of action one chooses (because one always chooses, even, and especially, if one attempts to evade the taking of a position) must be argued for, defended, and reflected upon constantly in light of new ideas and encounters. Furthermore, this condition entails that the responsibility for the subject's position rests with her alone, rather than being legitimated in advance by some external principle. This has a denaturalising and politicising effect on positions taken, making possible a radical shaking up of notions once assumed to be essential or universal. It is to this that Derrida points when he notes that deconstruction 'is too political for some people, can seem paralyzing to those who only recognize politics with the help of pre-war slogans' (cited in Elam, 1994, p. 90).

Consequently, the radical potential of deconstruction consists, third, in the extent to which it intervenes at the level of conscious and unconscious processes of subject-production and reproduction. The question of the subject of resistance is explored by Eagleton, who suggests that deconstruction ultimately precludes the possibility of a functional and effective revolutionary subjectivity: it preserves 'some of the dominant themes of traditional bourgeois liberalism by a desperate, last-ditch strategy: by sacrificing the subject itself, at least in any of its customary modes'. The subject is consequently rendered 'impotent as any kind of agent at all, least of all a revolutionary one' (1981, p. 138). In contrast to this reading, Derrida suggests that 'a deconstructionist approach to the boundaries that institute human subjectivity... [can] lead to reinterpretation of the whole apparatus of boundaries within which a history and culture have been able to confine their criteriology' (1992, p. 19); as such, it is precisely the 'customary modes' of subjecthood identified by Eagleton that Derrida seeks to problematise.

At the heart of Derrida's intervention is the suggestion that prevailing Western modes of subjectification themselves are not innocent as regards contemporary concrete ethico-political problems, and that resistances to onto-political totalisations can emanate from challenging such processes at the level of one's subjecthood. The question that arises here is whether such a challenge to conventional forms of subjectivity amounts to a 'sacrifice', as Eagleton argues, or rather

a politically salient attempt to reflect upon and intervene in the process of subjectification and identity-production and reproduction, as Derrida suggests. For Eagleton, insofar as the subject itself become implicated in and destabilised as a consequence of deconstruction, the price one pays 'is the highest of all: death' (1981, p. 136). He explains:

Deconstruction is the death drive at the level of theory: in dismembering a text, it turns its violence masochistically upon itself and goes down with it, locked with its object in a lethal complicity that permits it the final inviolability of pure negation. The deconstructionist nothing lieth because he nothing affirmeth. (1981, p. 136–7)

Yet, he continues, such death is not final because metaphysics will live on; similarly deconstruction,

as a 'living' death, will regroup its forces to assault anew. Each agonist is ever-slain and ever-resurrected; the compulsion to repeat, to refight a battle in which antagonist can never be destroyed because he is always everywhere and nowhere, to struggle towards a (self)-killing that will never quite come, is the dynamic of deconstruction... [D]econstruction is kept alive by what contaminates it, and can therefore reap the pleasures of a possible self-dissolution which, as one form of invulnerability, is mirrored by another, the fact that it can never die because the enemy is within and unkillable. (1981, p. 137)

In short, in this reading deconstruction is self-defeating; it comprises a form of intervention which renders it, and its subject, highly vulnerable to its own violent gestures whilst ensuring it, and its subject, live on to continue this masochistic process ad infinitum. Key here is the notion that a certain pleasure is derived from such self-annihilation; Eagleton concludes that 'the moment in which all of this occurs is of course the moment of jouissance or petite mort' (1981, p. 137).

The crucial question thus emerges of whether such a radical 'emptying out' effects anything politically salient, or whether it simply results in catatonic self-torturing/pleasuring at the precipice of a self-styled abyss. In contrast to Eagleton's reading, in the spirit of a more Derridean (and, on a different day, Nietzschean) tone, I would suggest that such a death only follows if the subject is construed in a particular Cartesian manner. To the degree that it insists upon second- and third-order critiques—of alternative narratives proffered and of the author of such re-writings herself—in addition to initial challenges to processes of conceptual and political ordering, deconstruction aims to 'put consciousness into question in its assured certainty of itself' (Derrida, 1982, p. 17), and in so doing, following gestures made by, amongst others, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger and Lacan, to begin to think the possibility of post-foundational forms of subjectivity. Eagleton objects to this on the basis that Derrida's thought

ignores the extent to which a certain provisional stability of identity is essential not only for psychical well-being but for revolutionary political agency. It contains no adequate theory of such agency, since the subject would now seem no more than the decentered effect of the semiotic process; and its valuable attention to the split, precarious, pluralistic nature of all identity slides at worst into an irresponsible hymning of the virtues of schizophrenia. Political revolution becomes, in effect, equivalent to carnivalesque delirium... (1991, p. 197–8)

In this reading, such self-referentiality and fracturing precisely serves the interests of forces of global ordering insofar as a subject possessing particular, if provisional, certitudes about itself and socio-political orientation is necessary for radical political intervention and resistance. I would suggest, in contrast, that to the extent that the micro-workings of ordering occur simultaneously at the level of the material and within the subject, learning to explore the ways in which one is formed and reformed in light of processes of global and inter-personal ordering can comprise a crucial site of political resistance. This is, of course, not to suggest that one can finally identify and thereby renounce such processes, but rather that within the confines of these one can attempt to unpick parts of oneself such that elements of such micro-gestures of ordering and subject-(re)production become at least partially identifiable and interpretable. This reflects closely, for instance, ongoing feminist and post-colonial calls for the interrogation of patriarchal and colonial logics at work at the level of thought, consciousness, and language, the invisible micro-violences which undergird concrete political violences. For Hoy, such an intervention amounts to 'proposing a different moral psychology' (2004, p.180). Such a process entails that the subject take itself as well as its political locale as the object to be resisted; attempting to elucidate the ways which one is always constructed as part of, and therefore complicit in, that which one seeks to resist can be, somewhat paradoxically, a gesture of both defiance and agency.

Part of the radicalism of such a deconstructive mode of engagement is its defiance of the licence so central to prevailing forms of subjecthood cultivated with contemporary Western societies of the right to 'look away', to read lives, or tacitly accept scripting of lives, as being of differing value, of tolerating and sanctioning hierarchies of grievability and mournability (Butler, 2004). In a cultural context which accepts and encourages ignorance of and indifference to one's embeddedness in relations of violence, deconstruction can enact a form of resistance by insisting on looking, thinking, and feeling in sites of acute discomfort from which it would be easier to turn away. In this sense, deconstruction takes seriously Nietzsche's call for political subjects who are 'inquisitive to a fault, investigators to the point of cruelty, with unhesitating fingers for the intangible, with teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible' (1997, p. 32), subjects endeavouring to resist the violences of onto-political consolidation in the spheres of the material, the philosophical, and the recesses of their own subjecthood.

## Notes

1 Concrete examples of this are too numerous to mention any but a few: one would be the prevalence of highly problematic gender politics as seen in many activist sites for instance, in the recent scandals surrounding the occurrence and handling of sexual assault and rapes within the Socialist Workers Party in the UK; another, the transphobia and colonialisms rife in many feminist organisations in Europe and the USA; a third, the widespread use of militarised imagery, clothing, and vocabularies utilised in many anti-militarist organisations. Specific examples of these will be discussed below. While I am not intending to draw a clear line between acts of resistance and acts which are re-entangled into propping up prevailing forms of global ordering—to do so would be neither possible nor desirable—what I am suggesting is that there is a widespread problem within radical sites, both within and beyond the academy, in that the reproduction of certain violences is ignored. This, in my view, amounts to at least a partial reinscription of the forms of resistance

proffered in these spaces back into normalised forms exclusion and hierarchy characteristic of current of global ordering.

2 In invoking the notion of 'concrete' here, I am anticipating the criticism that such an auto-deconstructionist mode of resistance remains abstracted and removed from 'real world' or 'material' intervention. As will be demonstrated below, the realms of thought and action, or theory and practice, are by no means distinct, the one having a direct bearing on the other.

3 The question of 'affirmationism' in contemporary radical thought has been skilfully interrogated by Noys (2012). Further discussion of this important critique is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper.

4 This is to be understood figuratively as a shorthand for indicating the (post)Enlightenment exposure of a certain abyss in which stable onto-political foundations and grounds were fundamentally undermined, rather than as a claim that religion has ceased to play a crucial role in contemporary political life. For discussion of this see the Forum entitled 'International Politics and the "Death of God"', in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 42 (1).

5 The problems of the romanticism of this are important for what follows; such a framing is ripe for a deconstructive analysis itself.

6 There is much more to be said regarding the intersections and parallels between Derrida's deconstruction and Adorno's 'negative dialectics', in particular their different framings of the relationship between the subject and object of thought. This is, however, unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

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